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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 USUN NEW YORK 000173

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TAGS: PGOV PREL UNMIKI YI

SUBJECT: P-3 PUSHES DPKO TO FIELD A MORE ROBUST UNMIK

REF: USUN 163

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for Reasons 1.4 b/d

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. P-3 deputy permanent representatives told U/SYG Guehenno on February 22 that UNMIK and KFOR need to robustly deter violence and Serbian efforts to establish de facto partition of Kosovo during the transition period. DPKO agreed to bar Serbian minister Samardzic from entering Kosovo, but maintained that UNMIK's status neutrality and the practicalities of policing a very porous border required a careful balancing of coercion and restraint. SYG Ban asked Ambassador Khalilzad to have the USG try to persuade Kosovo Prime Minister Thaci to respect UNMIK's role under resolution 1244 during the transition. See Action Request in paragraph ¶6. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) In a February 22 meeting, U.S., UK, and French Deputy PermReps pushed UN Under Secretary-General for Peacekeeping (DPKO) Jean-Marie Guehenno and DPKO Europe Division chief David Harland to encourage UNMIK to react more robustly to Serbian provocations. Ambassador Wolff said UNMIK authority needs to be asserted and defended against Serbian challenges during the transition period, that UNMIK assertiveness is perfectly consistent with UNMIK neutrality, and that UNMIK firmness in anticipation of violence is essential to the avoidance of both soft and hard partition.

¶3. (C) UKUN DPR Karen Pierce told Guehenno and Harland frankly that "UNMIK should have default instructions to err on the side of robustness," adding that "the danger of not acting robustly is far greater than the danger of wounding Serb sensitivities." She urged DPKO to coordinate more closely with KFOR to make use of KFOR's more plenary powers of detention, as for example had often been done to prevent ethnic Albanian radicals from inciting violence by crossing into Kosovo from Macedonia. French DPR Jean-Pierre Lacroix qualified his remarks as similar in kind if not degree to those of the U.S. and UK. He said France "supports a robust response but is also sensitive to perceptions on the ground and a need to maintain UNMIK-Serbia communication."

¶4. (C) U/SYG Guehenno replied that DPKO had advised UNMIK, in the aftermath of the February 21 violence in Belgrade, to stop people at the border who seemed at all suspicious. The practical problem, he said, is that troublemakers coming south from Serbia can easily circumvent the border gates on foot or even in vehicles because there are many trails and unpaved roads criss-crossing the border/administrative boundary line. Harland said UNMIK's 200 border police can't possibly close the border and even the dedication of all 3,500 available KFOR troops in the area could not completely close it. Recognizing that troublemakers were on hand, Guehenno said, UNMIK and KFOR quickly broke up today's demonstration in Mitrovica.

¶5. (C) Guehenno appealed for P-3 understanding of the UN's delicate effort to remain status neutral, which he said

required UNMIK/KFOR to maintain a border/administrative boundary line but to avoid being too coercive for fear of creating harder positions among all parties. He said he was gratified that all Security Council members, during the February 18 public session, had rallied around resolution 1244 as the enduring manifestation of Kosovo authorities. He reported that SRSG Rucker was taken aback on February 21 when Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaci announced to him that "1244 is now only for KFOR." Coming on the heels of a public statement attributed to Kosovo Deputy Prime Minister Hajredin Kuci that the government of Kosovo will henceforth decide who visits Kosovo, Guehenno said the UN could use P-3 help in persuading the Thaci government "not to overplay its hand." He wants Thaci to appreciate that a measure of ambiguity regarding division of authority is in the best interest of all concerned.

¶6. (C) UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon later called Ambassador Khalilzad to add a personal request that Thaci be reminded to respect the transition period during which UNMIK remains in charge in Kosovo. Ambassador Khalilzad assured the SYG that the U.S. would convey this message to Thaci. Post requests that Department do so through USOP.

¶7. (C) Pressing Guehenno on Kosovo-Serbia border operations, Ambassador Wolff suggested that UNMIK should quickly re-establish customs collections at gates 1 and 31 and should not allow Serbian ministerial-level visits for the time being. Guehenno replied that customs operations would be returned to normal within a few days. On the travel of ministers, he insisted UNMIK should also avoid overplaying its own hand by cracking down on travel. He would prefer the partition drama play itself out in Belgrade, as radicals overreacted, rather than Mitrovica.

USUN NEW Y 00000173 002 OF 002

¶8. (C) Ambassador Wolff then focused on Minister for Kosovo Slobodan Samardzic by reading some of his recent press comments (the border attacks were "legitimate" and "in accordance" with Belgrade policy; Belgrade would not allow northern Kosovo customs points to form part of a state border) and asking whether Samardzic would be banned from Kosovo. Guehenno replied that DPKO was consulting with the UN office in Belgrade. (NOTE. Harland later told DepPolCouns that the consultation would result in a UN demarche to Samardzic in which he would be informed that he would not be considered for travel to Kosovo until he publicly retracted these incendiary comments.)

KHALILZAD